

0971

THE END OF 'ANNUS HORRIBILIS' PRESS RELEASE
AUSTRALIANS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

THE END OF 'ANNUS HORRIBILIS' PRESS RELEASE

AUSTRALIANS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

1992 sees the end of a horrible year for the Queen and the Royal Family. Quite apart from personal crises, there was a terrible fire at Windsor Castle and ceaseless media hounding.

It is important for those who support the present constitutional arrangements in Australia to remind themselves, and others, of the limited significance of these events for us.

Under the Australian Constitution, the only member of the Royal Family who has any mention and any rôle in Australia is the Queen. The Prince of Wales is mentioned indirectly in the Oath of Allegiance to the Queen's "heirs". But beyond that, the travails of the Royal Family are interesting, sell newspapers, but are not constitutionally relevant to Australia. It is vital that we distinguished in the public's mind - and in our own - the *institution* of constitutional monarchy and its temporary *incumbents*.

If the incumbents are people of admirable quality - as the Queen unarguably is - the institution is undoubtedly strengthened. Candour requires us to say that the events of the past few months have not helped the cause of constitutional monarchy in Australia. To claim otherwise would be ridiculous. But it is not always that the institution has been strengthened by current incumbents. We have been spoiled throughout most of this century by dutiful, hard-working and thoroughly respectable monarchs - George V, George VI and Elizabeth II. For most of the 19th century, Queen Victoria before them was also a pillar of respectability. With other monarchs, it was not always so. Yet the enduring institutional arrangement of

constitutional monarchy survived indifferent incumbents. Why? Because the system puts a check on political ambitions. It reminds all public officers: Ministers, other politicians, judges and officials that they are all but temporary servants of the whole people, symbolised by the Crown. The overweening ambitions of dictators and autocrats have been held in check by the constitutional system.

In Australia, the very absence of the Queen and the development of an indigenous form of a society without the pretensions of an ever-present Head of State is itself thoroughly modern and suitable to the age of internationalism. The last thing we need in Australia is to join the world of nationalistic false pride and jingoism. Therefore, whilst the separation of the Prince and Princess of Wales in December 1992 and the various other events of 1992 are a cause for sadness and regret, they do not touch the essence of the argument for the retention of constitutional monarchy in Australia as a *system* suitable for Australia. That system is deeply entrenched in our constitutional instrument. But deeper still in the psyche of a nation which has known no other system and has one of the five oldest continuously operating constitutions of the world. Such precious stability should not be kicked aside because of a year of personal turmoil in a few unhappy lives.

It is the system which is the strength of our constitutional monarchy as it works for us. That it also has at its head at this time such a hard working, professional, moral and admirable person as the Queen is an added bonus that no republican can take away. Fortunately, the Queen Mother is still alive, well and working hard at 92. The Queen, whose health is excellent, will, we hope, likewise survive long to reign over us. Media talk of the "succession" is idle speculation when it is almost certainly more

than twenty or thirty years away. All such talk will be wrapping the fish and chips next week.

Things settle down. The *status quo* will become the reality. The Queen will continue her marvellous service including to Australia. And above all the institution - the enduring institution - will remain as a strong symbol of continuity in a world of fractured states, shattered peoples, blood and turmoil.

When we say "Long Live the Queen" we pray not only for Her Majesty's life and contentment but for the enduring institution which she heads and which we, Australians, fortunately share.